

**Common
Milkweed**
*Asclepias
syriaca*

**Swamp
Milkweed**
*Asclepias
incarnata*

**Butterfly
Milkweed**
*Asclepias
tuberosa*

**Purple
Milkweed**
*Asclepias
pupurascens*



Monarch butterflies are some of the most recognizable wildlife in North America. They undertake remarkable migrations over multiple generations across thousands of miles, beginning in Mexico, across the United States, and into Canada. Indiana is part of their journey.

Monarchs are beautiful insects with four vibrantly colored wings. Males have dark spots on each hindwing and their wing veins are thinner than those of females. Monarchs are important pollinators for our crops and flowers.

Monarch Butterfly



Monarchs are in trouble. Monitoring studies at overwintering sites show a steady decline in monarch populations. Some common threats include loss and degradation of habitat, natural disease, predation, pesticides, herbicides and adverse weather. However the biggest threat is the lack of native milkweed plants.

Monarchs depend on native milkweed plants for three reasons. When female monarchs arrive in Indiana mid-summer the only place they will lay eggs is on milkweed plants. The young

caterpillars then rely on it as their only food source. Also, the chemical compounds in native milkweed plants transfer to the caterpillars, making them toxic to predators. No other plant provides this protection.

Monarchs require mid-summer blooming nectar species as an adult food source as they migrate north through Indiana and late-summer species as they return south to Mexico.

With the decrease in number of milkweed plants across the country, the monarch butterfly population is decreasing and will continue to do so without human intervention.



Photos courtesy of US Fish and Wildlife Service

Types of Monarch Habitat

Farm fields, hedgerows, borders, gardens, landscaping, natural and restored areas and managed corridors are all suitable monarch habitat, as long as milkweed is present.

What Can You Do?

If you own or manage land you can play an important role in the conservation of monarch butterflies by following these monarch-friendly practices.

- Plant native flowers in fallow fields, hedgerows, buffer strips, backyards, gardens and other places to provide food for butterflies or rejuvenate an existing area by adding native milkweed to the mix of flowers.
- Plant a combination of mid-summer and late-blooming species, with an overlap in flowering times to fuel butterfly breeding and migration.
- Plant only native milkweed plants to provide food for caterpillars. Do not use commercially available tropical milkweeds as these may actually harm caterpillars.
- Use insecticides, including seed treatments and herbicides wisely.
 - If insecticides are needed, use the least toxic alternative and apply early or late in the day, when fewer butterflies are present, since insecticides will kill monarchs.
 - Herbicides, if required, should be applied with targeted spot treatments instead of a broadcast method to avoid pollinator habitat.
 - Minimize chemical drift onto pollinator habitat

NRCS Can Help

The Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and Farm Service Agency (FSA) have financial and technical assistance programs available to help you with monarch and pollinator plantings.

Technical assistance includes assessing your property for potential pollinator habitat, developing a plan to establish or rejuvenate a pollinator-friendly area and making seed recommendations.

Financial assistance programs are available to farmers through the Farm Bill that can help with the cost of establishing conservation practices such as field border plantings, enhancing filter strips, prairie restoration, cover crop mixtures that include native milkweed, prescribed burning plans, inter-seeding additional forbs into existing stands, etc.

Contact your local USDA NRCS office for assistance in creating or improving monarch habitat. To find office locations visit www.in.usda.gov.

Additional Resources

- Indiana Biology Technology Note – Assessing Monarch Habitat
- Indiana Monarch Habitat Job Sheet
- Farming for Bees: <http://www.xerces.org/guidelines-farming-for-bees/>
- Pollinator Habitat Tips: <http://nebraskapf.com/habitat-programs/habitat-tip-series/>

